

TRIALS
OF A TENDERFOOT

By

Henry Sommers - Crocka



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Henry Somers-Cocks

Author of "Eastnor and its Malvern Hills,"

"The Mystery of Malvern Mire,"

"Edenbridge," etc.

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FOREWORD

By *DR. ANDREWS, O.B.E., M.A., D.D., Secretary of the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf, 63, Tufton Street, Westminster, S.W.1.*

Anyone who like myself, has lived a pioneer existence over-seas naturally has read with enthralling interest the experiences of the author on the early days of the Canadian West. When the author roamed the Great Plains the Indian was still a force in the land. Vast changes have taken place in the intervening period and the possibility of white settlement in a country nearly as large as Western Europe staggers our imagination. The souls who dare the task should be given adequate care.

The Fellowship of the Maple Leaf feels that the Dominion could support an immense population with adequate capitalisation and that with modern pressure. So evidently and literally the salvation of Great Britain depends upon the building up of these new areas. If a nation can be created, built upon the best traditions of the Old Land, then, a tremendous future lies in front of these great silent spaces. Settlers who undertake this task should have a pre-eminent claim upon the sympathies of the Mother Country. It is impossible to expect our kith and kin to undertake hard pioneer work without such encouragement. The folk who dare this overseas task are up against the raw of life and with it the additional handicap of complete divorce from the spiritual, intellectual, and social atmosphere of their youthful days in-England. The lack of this essential atmosphere makes the task of creating new homes almost unbearable. At home we are comfortably surrounded by the wealth of a thousand years, and a quality of life that has to be lost to be really understood.

Thousands of our people overseas are remote from the opportunities of systematic education and religion. Everything inevitably must give way before the titanic physical labour necessary to overcome the natural difficulties of settling a new country. Substitute lonely log shacks for the social life of England, and you catch the essence of a great problem. One of the greatest stories in our history is the foundation of these new countries laid by brave men and women seeking to create homes out of rude shacks. They have to create everything from the beginning. Yet these men and women by birth are far above pioneer levels. The poignancy of such a situation can only be understood of those who have lived among pioneer

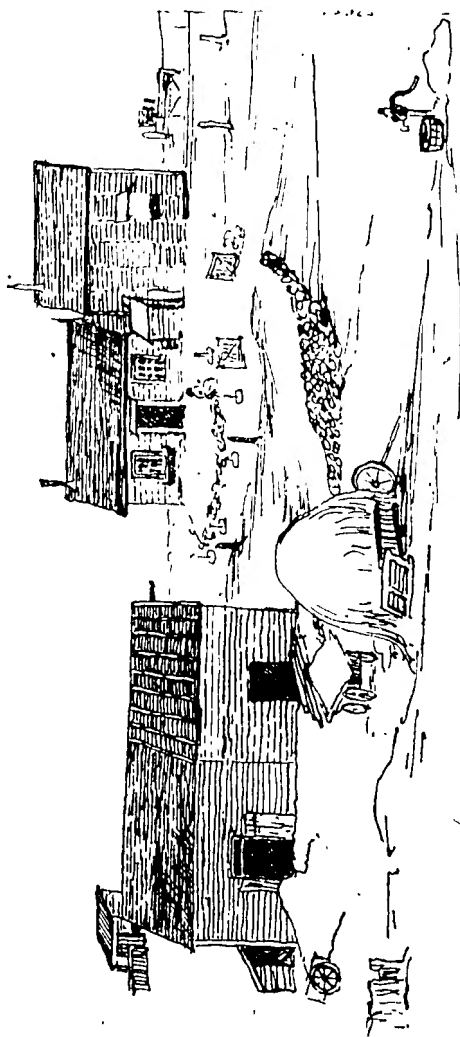
English folk. It is safe to say that on the establishment of the higher levels of existence in our back settlements depends entirely the question of British settlement overseas. I am secretary of a Fellowship of our Countrymen determined to see that these levels are incorporated into the life of England overseas. In this purpose we are sending doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, and using every possible method to make life livable to these people and to link them with the Old Land.

With the experiences of this little volume as a background perhaps readers will appreciate the task that societies like the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf are essaying in trying to meet the needs of our people overseas.

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*The illustrations are by Francis Bennetta Johnstone,
from sketches kindly lent by Mrs. Gerald Spring-Rice,
whose Husband took over the Farm from "the Boss"
naming it "Gatesgarth."*



THE ORIGINAL FARM.

I.

Through Fire and Water

In the early 'eighties there was a great rush of emigrants, especially from England and Scotland, to the vast prairies of the West of Canada. The widely-advertised offer of freehold land, known by the experience of Hudson Bay Company officials to be capable of producing heavy crops of wheat, oats, potatoes, and other foodstuffs, acted like a spur upon the "Old Country" farm hands, as well as upon clerks and others who were weary of the deadly monotony of office work. Thousands of people recognised that England, at any rate, was overcrowded, and these did their best to encourage the younger generation to try their luck in a new land which was welcoming settlers of all creeds and classes.

That stupendous undertaking, the Canadian Pacific Railway, was well on its wonderful way across Canada, which country has been well said to consist of a thousand miles of Rivers, a thousand miles of Lakes, a thousand miles of Prairies, and a thousand miles of Mountains.

It was the lure of the prairies that took hold of the young Englishman whom I shall hereafter call 'the Boss,' as that was what he became to me in the early spring of 1888. He longed for an open-air life, and although possessed of quite the usual share of brains, he had no desire to settle down to the ordinary routine of life in a city.

As the summer route of the St. Lawrence was not yet open, we crossed to New York, then by Chicago

to Winnipeg. My first trial began during that railway journey. To me had been given the important job of temporary banker. In order to prove myself a careful steward I had sewn up thirty golden sovereigns in a band inside my trousers. This was in addition to what loose cash I saw fit to keep in my pockets. It was the night after we left Chicago that I went to sleep in my bunk in the Pullman car. For safety's sake I kept on my trousers. Awakening suddenly in the night, I saw, by the faint light of the car, an arm over my face. Being naturally startled I clutched it with one hand, but remembered nothing more till I found myself being shaken by the negro porter telling me to make haste as we were just nearing the station where breakfast would be served.

Though feeling strangely sleepy, I roused myself, and at once, recalling my vision of an arm, I felt for my sovereigns. Needless to say, they were not in their band. The trousers had been stripped off, and all of my clothes had been turned inside out. Not a copper was left. There wasn't even a dollar with which to pay for breakfast. When this became known to my fellow passengers, they made a collection, which, by their generosity, enabled me to travel in comfort to Winnipeg, where it was possible to obtain further supplies.

When the coloured porter learned what had happened he appeared honestly startled, affirming that such a thing had never before happened in his train. This statement was somewhat discounted when, upon my saying that I wished to make a report of the matter for the benefit of the authorities, he produced a lengthy form, intended for this very purpose! However, I don't think that he was to blame. I felt pretty certain the thieves were a man and woman who had the lower bunk, and who had left the train,

with all their belongings, during the early hours of the morning. Needless to say, I never heard any more of the robbery, though the railway police promised to look carefully into the matter. If they met with any success in their efforts, I never heard of it.

Upon arrival at Winnipeg we visited Government and other offices, and quickly learned that all the best sites, those close to railway stations, had already been taken up. We therefore spent some hours looking round the city, which was suffering from 'growing pains' of various kinds, which included the digging of drains, a terrible job in the melting snow, with its effect upon the clay soil. It was a novel experience to see the excavators filling their shovels with clay, and then throwing out the clay and the shovel to men on the surface to clear, while these handed down fresh tools for a further consignment. We also watched the digging out of a horse which had slipped off the proper track in Main Street, and had sunk so deep that it was quite unable to get back to the track unaided. We paid a visit to old Fort Garry, for so long a centre of fur-trading with Indians and trappers, and which had gained for itself such notoriety in the first Rebellion under Louis Riel.

By the time we were leaving Winnipeg the Boss had made up his mind that there was little chance of finding a "plum" until we reached Regina. What he wanted was not absolutely level land, of which the greater part of the prairie appeared to consist, but something more diversified, and likely to be suitable for mixed farming.

It is necessary here to give some explanation as to how land was allotted to settlers.

The wonderful vision of driving a railway through thousands of miles of uninhabited country became

something more than a mere dream when the Canadian Authorities, realising that the project might contain vast possibilities, decided to give it all the support in their power. When they had arrived at this decision, and had thought the subject over carefully they undertook among other encouragements to the scheme, to set aside half the land, for some miles on both sides of the track, as free gifts to any would-be settler, and the alternate square miles, free of cost, to the railway company.

The result was that in 1883 many thousands of square miles had been surveyed, and at the corner of each section of 640 acres a small mound of turf had been raised with an iron rod in it which held a square piece of iron on which was stamped a number which told the passer-by exactly where he was.

Any responsible person could acquire 160 acres practically free of cost, while the adjoining 160 acres were kept for him in case he required them within a reasonable time. The C.P.R. land could be bought at the same time at the trifling price of about ten shillings an acre.

Making our headquarters at Regina, which already had a population of 1,100 men, and, perhaps, half-a-dozen women, we got a ride each morning on the caboose of a freight train, of which several passed daily, carrying rails, sleepers, and spikes, etc., for the making of the railway. Having no luggage to bother us, we left the train where we liked, spent the day wandering from one section to another, and towards evening managed to get a lift on an empty train back to Regina.

In this manner we succeeded in examining a good deal of land near a station, and finally decided to take

up our quarters on sections which lay on both banks of the Grand Coulee, about four miles to the south of Pense, about twenty miles west of Regina. During the melting of the snow, the Coulee was quite a river, with banks twenty or thirty feet high, covered, in most parts, with huge water-worn stones. Who would have guessed, upon viewing this river for the first time, that by the end of May, its bed would be as dry and grass-covered as the rest of the prairie?

The great decision as to our location having been made, the next job was to buy a wagon, a yoke of oxen, and everything else that was needed for a sojourn on the bare prairie. As we had never seen oxen at work, and were quite ignorant as to their management, we got Mr. Gillespie, from whom we bought Jack and Bill, to give us some hints. We soon learned the eight words of command: "Gee," slope to the right; "Wo Gee," go sharp to the right; "Wo back Gee," turn right round; "Har," slope to the left; "Wo har," go sharp to the left; "Wo back har," turn left round; "Ho," stop; "Gee" or "Git," go faster. No reins were needed, though a whip was usually considered a useful accessory!

The next morning, the Boss and I, having paid our hotel and other bills, made an early start, the wagon being loaded with a plough, a tent, a cooking stove, provisions, and all requirements for a stay of several weeks. We were accompanied by a very pleasant young Englishman, named Joseph Last. He had been a medical student, but wanted some experience in the wilds, before settling down in the Old Country.

There was no road to Pense, but we knew that if we kept the lately made C.P.R. in view we couldn't miss it; as it was the first station west of Regina at that time. Bumping along over the prairie at about



two miles an hour, all went well until we became aware of a smell of fire, and quickly learned that the prairie to the north-west of us was ablaze, and the wind was driving the flames towards us. As the grass was thin we felt no anxiety, except that we should be delayed in arriving at our destination.

Putting a match to the grass over which we had just driven we let it burn away from us, and when a good patch was blackened we backed the wagon on to the burnt ground, unyoked the oxen, and gave them some oats to remove their fears. As the fire approached, the smoke was unpleasant, but when it reached our burned patch it divided in two, and soon caught up the fire which we had started.

Having waited on the spot for an hour or so, to let the ground cool, we made a fresh start, and journeyed without mishap until we reached a broad lake which we rightly guessed was the same Coulee as that on which we had decided to make our home, though about five miles north-east of it. From the railway officials at Pense we had been warned not to attempt the crossing of the stream without a guide. As it was beginning to snow, and a bitter wind had got up, we were anxious not to pitch our tent on the spot, as we knew the railway station was not more than a mile away.

Leaving me in charge of the wagon, the Boss and Last made their way to the railway, and the last I saw of them, as the darkness and snow increased, they were walking across the trestle bridge which spanned the Coulee. Lighting a lantern, I made myself as comfortable as I could in the biting wind, and awaited the Boss' return. In something over an hour, I heard him shouting, and shouted back. He soon saw the light and introduced me to a Canadian who had most kindly volunteered to steer us through the water.

Assuring us that we could not get the wagon across in the darkness, he advised us to lead the oxen, saying that he knew the track well, and that it would not take us through water that would come over our top-boots. Whether it was the darkness or the snow-fall, or both combined, I know not. What I do know is that before we had gone a hundred yards the water was up to my waist, and was icy cold. After wading in this way for some twenty minutes, I remarked that the wind was coming from the north when we left the wagon, and for some minutes past we had been facing it. So, after a short discussion, we turned more westwards, and soon found the depth was lessening. Upon emerging from the Coulee we saw a lantern which showed us our destination for the night, and glad we were to find a red hot stove in the middle of the station waiting-room.

Our clothes were frozen stiff upon us, but soon melted as willing helpers gradually removed them and hung them up to dry. Borrowing an overcoat to put over my wet shirt, after a supper of bacon and bread and coffee, the Boss and I lay down on a feather bed, with another over us. This was intended to do the usual work of blankets; and it did it, as we both slept like tops, and were none the worse for the experience.

The next morning we engaged a man to work for us, an Ontario harness-maker, he afterwards turned out to be, though he was a sufficiently good carpenter to undertake to build a shack for us. He didn't know the prairie any better than we did, as he had only just arrived from down East. Like all Canadians he was a "knowledgeable" man, a jack-of-all-trades, just the Helper the Boss needed to start his new home.

Our wagon, with all our belongings, soon reached the Boss' Section, and it needed very little thought to enable him to settle the site for the homestead. This was on the north side of the Coulee, with a delightful spread of rocks which broke the monotony of the prairie, and with a pleasant view in the distant south of a blue chain of hills, which reminded him of his childhood spent within sight of the Malverns. Before starting to build a house on the prairie it is advisable to dig a cellar, as this is a necessity if you hope to keep potatoes and other foodstuffs from freezing in the winter. While two of us started this excavating, the others marked out a plot for potato-growing. These must be planted early, as, if they are not ready to dig by the middle of August, the frost will spoil them. One common expression of Canadians, which revealed the loyalty of Canucks in general was, "Potatoes must be planted before the Queen's birthday," i.e., May 24th."

To plant potatoes on the prairie you begin by "breaking" the surface, i.e., ploughing off the turf to a depth of two inches. On the furrow thus exposed you place the seed at the proper distance apart; then break two furrows to cover the seed. This is all that is necessary for a first crop, and certainly the result with us was wonderful. The harvest was a splendid one, so much so that we sent three huge potatoes, which between them nearly filled a stable bucket, to a market gardener at Bromyard, who, in returning thanks, said he had planted three good-sized rows from them!

The month of May and the five that followed it were intensely busy ones, house-building, well-digging, hay-making, being the chief occupations, in addition to "breaking" in the spring and "back-setting" in the fall of the year. The latter consists of

ploughing again the already broken turf, but increasing the depth of the tilth to four inches, when the land is ready for seeding the following spring. Ploughing continues without any cessation, except when some other job is especially necessary, until in November the plough is found frozen into the ground where it was left the previous evening, and has to remain in its winter quarters until the thaw comes in April.

During the summer the Boss travelled east, and brought back a consignment of Berkshire pigs. These ran pretty well wild, making great friends with the cows and oxen as well as with the men on the place. One sow, named Lucy, would walk all over the place with any one of us, just like a dog, and would shake hands in the most friendly manner. She couldn't bear to be left alone at the farm, and therefore detested Sundays, when all the men went off for a Service at the railway station.

One very hot day in July, I was taking an afternoon Service in the waiting-room, having left the melancholy Lucy at the farm. I was just giving out my text for the sermon, when I was startled by hearing a well-known grunt on the platform. Looking to the open door, I suddenly caught the eye of our faithful follower, who had braved the heat of the four and a half miles' trail, in order to find friendly faces! I am afraid very few other members of my flocks have ever walked such a distance to hear me preach! Alas! my words did not greatly affect her, as she slept soundly right through the ordeal. After the Service was over, the congregation, finding her too much exhausted to move, lifted her up and placed her in a wagon for the return journey. She grew to be such a friend of the family that the usual lot of pigs was not for her. She helped largely to people the pigstyes of the north-west, and died peacefully, at the age of fourteen years.

Remembering our experience of the prairie-fire, and having been stoked-up with stories of the havoc caused by similar occurrences, we decided that the moment our house was built we would protect it from danger of this nature. This, we were told, could easily be done by means of a fire-screen. This was effected by ploughing a few furrows about a hundred yards away from and around the house and farm buildings; and then making another circle of furrows about twenty yards further away. When the grass between the outer and inner furrows is burned you have a grassless circle which no fire can cross. After this was done we could always go happily to bed, because we knew that if the fires we often saw on the horizon were to reach our screen they would divide and pass around us, leaving our homestead unscathed.

II.

“ All's Well that Ends in a Well ”

Some of the most useful discoveries have been made through a very trifling circumstance ; think of Newton and his apple, or the other fellow with his tea-kettle ! Not that I am dreaming of ranking myself with those scientific geniuses. But you shall hear of my discovery for yourself, if you will read this chapter.

How clearly I remember, in the old garden in Worcestershire, where watercresses grew, and where . . . but I will not bore you by going back to my childhood for this yarn !

The year 1885 was the date of my discovery. It is easy to fix, for it was the year of the Half Breeds' rebellion in North West Canada. The rebellion was considered ended when the leader, Louis Riel, was hanged at Regina. That was just before the fall of the year, and you would have thought our men would have come back to help with the harvest at once. Not they ! They had found out how to get higher wages in the towns or under Government.

On the farm where I was working, half-way between Regina and Moosejaw, there were 150 acres of wheat and oats to be harvested by three men ; they had been sown by the same three ; that is to say, by the Boss, myself, and a hired lad called Bill.

It was an exceptionally dry summer, even for that dry district ; therefore, to add to our labours, we were obliged to take a tank on wheels to a slough nine miles away to get water. The majority of these

sloughs, upon which so many Canadian farmers depend in the summer, had, with a few exceptions, gone dry. As for wells, we had tried in two places, sinking to a depth of 35 feet in one place and 85 feet in another. Not a drop of water for our trouble. The lack of water was a problem even on the railway. The C.P.R. carried it in their trains along the dry belt, for the needs of their employees in that section.

I remember the reply of an optimist expert well-borer at Pasqua when I asked him how deep he meant to go.

“I don't guess I'll quit till I reach Water, Hell, China or Cinders!” (China is considered by Canadians to be their Antipodes.) When he spoke he had reached a depth of 1,500 feet, having found none of the four goals mentioned.

The harvest over, Bill and I were bucked up when the Boss ordered us off to the Qu'Appelle River, some five or six hours' journey away, to get a couple of loads of poles for fencing. There wasn't any slacking in those days after harvest, and it was necessary to get the poles before the snow fell. “You can each take one of the wagons without their boxes,” said he, “and you must take a sack with blankets and food.”

The wagons were drawn by oxen, which do well on such pasturage as could be found on the way. For ourselves, I packed plenty of blankets and clothes for a cold night by the river, as well as bread, bacon, treacle, and tea. A kettle and a frying-pan completed the outfit. The Boss gave me a hand in packing them up.

It was 4 a.m., and still dark, when I started to yoke the oxen. Bill was all around doing this, that,

and the other, greatly excited at the adventure. I saw him rope the sack on last thing, then off we went. No John Gilpin pace about it though, with oxen to drive!

There was no road, so we went slowly enough, guided by the compass, bumping over the "hummocks" of the prairie. The air was fine at that hour of the morning, and now and again we sang. Perhaps you would like to know one of the songs? It's never been published, I can guarantee.

A cowboy's life the cure for all disease, 'tis sure,
And quickly shifts all worries off your chest;
There's a freedom in the air which you won't find anywhere
But on ranches and on prairies in the West.

(Chorus.)

So to all the lads who groan,
And the lassies too who moan,
That England's overcrowded, like a slum,
We say to each, "Go West,
You'll quickly find 'tis best:
Here's room for every tenderfoot who'll come."

Verse 2.

Some talk about the frost, and the fear of getting lost
In a snow-storm or a blizzard—have no dread!
On a broncho, with a gun, and a compass or the sun,
You're as safe as when you're tucked up in your bed.

Verse 3.

When guarding herds at night, or with Indians making fight,
You growl and say "I guess I'll have to trip!"
Yet you'd never stay down East, though there all danger
ceased,
For the Wild has called and holds you in its grip.

A train was coming along as we gave almighty bumps over the C.P.R., and we cheered her as she passed by. Perhaps it was a smell of cooking about

her that made us feel hungry. We rejoiced at the thought of the food in our sack, and pushed on to the river, where we hoped to picnic.

I won't say much here about Bill, as he felt the result of his carelessness as much as I did! More, perhaps, since he was a growing boy. 'Twas just a sack of coiled-up ropes he'd hitched on to the wagon in mistake for our food and comforts! No doubt the mice and gophers would be enjoying our grub in the wagon-shed at home that night.

Poor Bill! He wanted to go off back to the farm at once. He pulled a long face when I made him understand that the poles must be found first. He was a good chap all the same. He worked as hard as I did cutting down trees, stripping the branches, and dragging the poles up to the prairie with the oxen. Hunger isn't the best sauce for hard work though it goes very well with a good dinner. It was night before the poles were ready to be loaded up.

September nights are cold. The only hope of warmth was a fire. As we lighted one the wind got up, keen and icy, smothering us with smoke on the leeward side. The other side of the fire didn't seem much good, the wind driving the heat right away from us. All night we stood, first one side and then the other, or tried to get a bit of shelter from the oxen. They didn't mind the cold as they quietly chewed the cud.

Before we lit the fire I had looked round for a herb of some sort that we could put inside us. It was then that, poking about in the water, I saw a lot of a pinkish flower just like the one I was saying grew in our garden at home. I'm no botanist and only knew it wasn't a daisy or a dandelion. But its roots trailed in the river, as they did at home.

Daylight came, after one of the longest nights I've ever known. We finished loading up, trying to forget we hadn't breakfasted first. By 12 o'clock all was securely roped and ready for the wagons.

The second team of oxen could generally be trusted to follow the first, so we thought one driver ought to be enough. There wasn't any likelihood of collisions with other vehicles, as you may suppose. So we tossed up to decide who should sleep on the top of his load for a couple of hours while the other took charge and drove. I had the luck to win the toss. It wasn't much luck as things turned out.

It was 2 o'clock when I awoke; and the beasts had had a rest same as me! Bill had had a rest, too, for there he was fast asleep on his load, and the whole lot of us just where we were two hours before. Bill had a rough awakening, I fear.

We had a pow-pow over the situation, and both of us voted for going to the farm of Messrs. Hinde and Simpson—(are they still there? I wonder!) Their farm was only ten miles from where we were, though it wasn't on the direct track home.

To make a long story short, we did ourselves no good by that. We found them just starting off to buy stores. It was great generosity on their part to give us each a mug of tea and a crust—their last crust. Slightly refreshed, we pressed on again, and reached our farm at 9 p.m.—forty-one hours practically without food.

And what was the discovery? In the end that day's trip was worth as much as any whole year of my life!

A week later was the date fixed for the annual picnic—a great beanfeast and outing, to which settlers of both sexes came from far around to make merry after the harvest. Of course, someone had to stay at home in charge of the livestock. The Boss remarked that it was his turn to be the Englishman who did his duty.

“Not at all,” said I, in a great hurry. “As I’m going back home for Christmas, I ought to be the one to miss the fun here.” (The truth was I was busy plotting to have every man in the district out of the way while I tested a theory of mine. I was on the track of a secret, you see, and I couldn’t stand anyone around to share it, nor to throw cold water upon it, as the case might be.)

It was clear that someone must stay. The Sioux were rather fond of watching their chance to drive our cattle into some hollow, and then to claim a reward for having found them. We knew their tricks.

When the great day arrived, I watched the departure of the others with much impatience, and then prepared for my self-imposed task. This was nothing less than the sinking of a well alone!

You remember the familiar little weed I mentioned, the weed which grew near water at my home, and also on the banks of the Qu’Appelle River? A sort of “*Persicaria*” was the suggestion made by a friend to whom I described it.

There it was, not very prosperous, but actually alive and growing, and close to our stable door. Putting two and two together, I think I was justified in looking for water. Losing no time, I began to dig.

By 6 p.m. there was a hole nine feet deep, and the bottom was actually damp. It was time there was something to cheer me up, for I could no longer throw earth up from that depth, and night was coming on. Leaving the pick, spade, and ladder in the hole, I went up to make myself some tea—I wanted it badly.

When I returned I found the result surpassed my wildest hopes. My well was full of water up to within four feet of the surface. Feeling richly rewarded I could now go, tired but happy, to bed. For safety I covered the well with planks. The Boss and Bill returned during the night, but so tired was I that I never stirred to greet them.

Next morning, having seen to the horses and cooked the breakfast, I went to find the Boss. He was looking out of the door. He turned and saw me and cried, "What's that beastly mess you've made by the stables?"

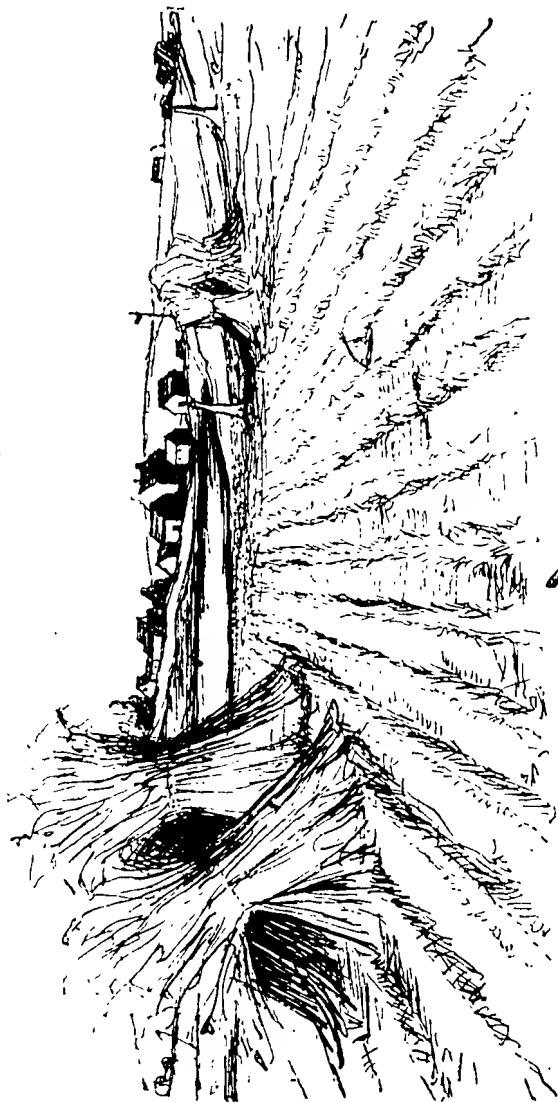
"You'd better go and see," said I. "There wasn't any mess there yesterday."

The next moment he was shouting, "Where did you get this water from?"

If you'd seen his face when I explained, you'd have understood my calling that the best day's work I ever did. I never saw a man so happy. No more going nine miles to fetch water in his tank—no—not that day, or ever again. The well proved indeed inexhaustible.

It was, however, too near the surface to escape the frost, so two pumps were borrowed to keep the water down while the hole was being deepened. Even pumps





GATESGARTH, PENS. SASK. COCKS' DAM.

(See also illustration on page 29 and editorial reference on opposite page).

could not lower the water-supply from that underground stream. We were obliged to cover the well to keep it from freezing.

If you doubt the truth of my story, drive twenty miles west of Regina and four and a half south of Pense. On the edge of the Grand Coulee you will find my well. It is still an attraction for tourists and picnickers from Regina. Good spring water is scarce in that neighbourhood now, as it was fifty-one years ago.

Jim Cropper, later on Dean of Gibraltar, developed great skill as a well-digger, and he and his brother made the dam, which was afterwards named after him—"Cropper's Dam." This held back quite a large lake in the dry bed of Grand Coulee.

For those who are interested in coincidences, I may here mention one of the strangest in my experience. Thirty years later on, I was Rector of a parish in Herefordshire. Hearing that a cottage which had been for some time vacant was occupied, I called and found the wife and family at home. Imagine my surprise to find the head of the family was my old friend Bill!

III.

Not Lost, But Gone Before

It was the custom in the North West Territory to cut hay for the winter wherever you could find it, so long as it was not on any land already occupied. Hay, on uncultivated land, was found in sloughs, and, though coarse, was excellent fodder for cattle and horses. In addition to this recommendation, it had the added property of being easily "made," as it dried in a few hours' sunshine, and didn't need to be turned.

When the hay-making time approached, I was sent out to search in a south-westerly direction for a good slough. I saddled a horse and provided myself with blankets, kettle, frying-pan, food, gun, compass, binoculars, and what I had previously found advisable to take on such an expedition, a small down pillow, as my ears always became sore after a night with a saddle as a bolster. (How often I have wondered what was the condition of Jacob's ears after sleeping on his stone pillow at Bethel!) With this and a hole in the ground for the hip-bone, I passed many fairly comfortable nights on the prairie. The great trial of such alfresco sleeps was the mosquitoes from June to September. Any part of the body which became exposed during sleep gave one misery during the next two days. I found a first-class slough just at sundown, and as I was about fifteen miles from home, I decided to camp on the spot. By doing so I could measure it, and find the best site for the camp.

Having tethered my horse on good grass, I had my supper, and was about to turn in for the night,

when I noticed that the cayuse was uneasy, so I walked up to him and petted him. Then I lay down, and was about to sleep, when he gave that horrible cry, which is seldom heard in ordinary life, the scream of a horse in fear! Starting to my feet, I saw three wolves near him, and promptly fired at them, thinking to scare them. It did so, and I never saw them again; but it scared Jerry also. With a desperate tug he pulled up his stake, and with it and his rope, he started off full gallop for home. It was some time before I saw him again.

There was nothing to be done till morning, so I had a good rest, though worried as to my actions in the future. In daylight I made full notes of the slough's possibilities as a hayfield, and, after breakfast, I loaded myself with all the impedimenta, including Jerry's bridle, the gun, and the saddle on my head for a huge solar topee.

I had tramped for about nine miles when I realised that a stone had found its way into one of my top-boots. Looking about me, I saw a rock which appeared to be a natural seat for a weary man, so, making my way to it, I sat down and pulled off the offending footwear. Holding it up to allow the stone to fall out of it (for I was anxious to know how a stone could have found its way in, for stones are rare visitors in that part of the prairie), I caught the stone in my other hand and began to examine it. What was my amazement to hear a cultured voice exclaim, "*Post te stone!*" To say that I was startled doesn't convey the full truth, for I had no idea that I was within six miles of any human being. And the expression "*Post te*" at once took me back to my old school, Charterhouse, where it was used by a boy who wanted to examine any object when you had done with it.

Looking up I saw a young man in brown overalls, very sunburnt, and wearing blue goggles, who said, "Don't you remember me? I'm young Malcolmson, of Weekites." Removing his hat and glasses, I then recognised him as an old schoolfellow, and you can picture my delight in finding a companion in that desolate region. He explained that he belonged to a land-surveying outfit, had happened on our farm the previous evening, and had spent the night there. In the morning the Boss had found Jerry, with his tethering rope and stake, at the stable door, and had realised the plight in which I must have found myself. So he asked the seven men of the outfit, who were scattering for their day's work, to keep an eye open for me, and Malcolmson had done so. He had seen me through his binoculars, and had hidden himself behind a rock. In this way he came upon me as the greatest surprise of my life, for he had recognised, from what the Boss had told him, that I was an old acquaintance! We had our lunch together, and I waited with him till his job was done, when he helped me to carry my load back to the farm.

That evening I cooked Johnny cakes, apple tarts, and other luxuries for the large party, who were so pleased with their supper that they asked me to become cook to the party, as their cook was leaving it. They were off to the extreme North West, viâ the Peace River, and I should have enjoyed the trip, but would have had to sign on for three years, and this would not have suited my plans for the future. If I had gone with them, I have since learned, I should have been among the earliest arrivals in the Klondyke Rush!

I soon found out why my culinary efforts had met with such approval. For some months past the party had received their provisions from a Government



CROPPER'S DAM. Gatesgarth Farm in distance. About 1906.
(See page 25).

store near a station of the C.P.R. This store had been visited by a skunk, which was killed among the foodstuffs. Everything in the store thenceforth tasted of skunk, and the Boss of the party, when making out his budgets for the next month or so, expressed his wish to receive so many pounds of skunk flavoured with bacon, skunk flavoured with flour, etc., etc. *Our* food did not taste of skunk!

Haymaking is about the most laborious work on the farm, especially when the hay must be mown with scythes, as is necessary when you have to cut the grass when it grows in water a few inches deep. You wear top-boots and hold the scythe so that you avoid cutting the grass below the water. This action brings into play (or perhaps I should more rightly describe it as into pain) certain muscles which are not generally used. The pain becomes worse and worse till there comes a time when you say to yourself, "I can't bear it any longer." You look at your fellow-labourer making the next swath, and shame prevents you giving in, though you know that he has had previous experience and doesn't feel the agony as you do. It is, however, marvellous how quickly nature adjusts itself to new conditions, and after two days or so the misery departs and the sweep of the scythe becomes quite enjoyable. We used to pack up tents and all necessities on a Monday morning, drive our livestock with us, and pitch our camp close to where we intended to build our ricks. When we had mown enough hay for the day, we carried it on to dry land, and after a few hours of sunshine (and the sun did shine there!) it was ready for the rick. Sleep was the one thing one wanted after such a day's toil. Work began at day-light, but an hour or two's recreation was usually the order of the day about noon, when one enjoyed the pleasant shade of a wagon. Sometimes these haying parties were quite friendly

affairs, as neighbouring farmers would unite in their work, and do their best to make the haymaking a holiday time.

When the hay was stacked the settler's difficulties were by no means ended. It was no easy task to lead the loaded wagons to the farm. The surface of the prairie is always rough, and when driving upon it, you can easily compare the going to what you think would be the effect of driving on a paved road from which every alternate paving-stone has been removed !

One such journey I can well recall. Bertie Eckford and I had gone with two hay wagons to a haystack which we had made about five miles away. We had loaded-up satisfactorily, and had started well on our return journey when we heard the roar of a wind-storm approaching from the west. Instinctively we both threw all our weight on the windward side of the loads, but the blast was so strong that both loads and wagons went over together. Fortunately we both fell clear of the wreckage and were not in any way the worse for the toss. The evening was approaching, and a bitter wind had arisen by the time we had righted the wagons and rebuilt their loads.

It was just at the time when winter was expected, and snow began to fall heavily. Having intended to be home in the daylight, we had foolishly taken no compass, and hadn't even a blanket between us. We made a start as we hoped in a homeward direction, letting the horses have their heads in the hopes that they would make for their stables ; but we soon guessed they were going the wrong way.

We therefore halted and examined the sky. There was one clear spot and through it we could see a few stars. Our knowledge of astronomy was strictly

limited, but something told me I was looking at the two Pointers to the North Star. Taking it for granted that my surmise was correct, we turned our wagons right round, for our horses had been leading us away from home, and drove them towards the north. The guidance was indeed Providential, for had we persisted in the horses' direction we should have been lost on the prairie on what proved to be a particularly wild and freezing night. As it was we had only driven a mile or two when we found the Boss and some others looking for us with lanterns, as they had become alarmed at our non-return, especially when they saw the kind of night to be expected.

On another occasion Archie Graham and I were nearing home with a big load of hay. We had loaded the wagon in the usual manner, with a plank in front and another at the tail, and all well roped. An unusually heavy bump caused great pressure on the front plank, which broke in two and fell on the horses' backs. This was too much of an insult even for such well-broken animals as they were. So off they went at a gallop. Archie stuck to the reins, but was in imminent danger of slipping after the broken plank, when I, who was behind him, clutched him by the hair, which happened to be ready for the barber's clip. The terrified horses dashed down the side of the Coulee, and, to the horror of the Boss and others with him, dragged the wagon through the rock-strewn bank. On the level below they stopped of their own accord, close to their stable. No harm was done, but when we examined the wheel-tracks between the rocks, all felt that we had had a miraculous escape. I lost sight of Archie soon after this incident, and we didn't meet again for forty years. When we did his first remark to a friend of mine was, "This is my friend who saved my life when the horses ran away with the load of hay!" Absalom was unlucky to have long hair,

but Archie, after his escape, thought his luck had been in through failing to visit a tonsorial artist !

In districts nearer to timber than was our homestead the difficulties of the winter-provision for cattle were increased by the danger of wolves. Harmless as these pests are in mild weather, the disappearance of their ordinary victims in extreme cold weather renders them ravenous and very daring even in the presence of firearms.

According to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, quoted by Walter Duranty, "wolves never run in packs and never dare to attack an adult human being unless the human is wounded or prostrate from cold or hunger." This may be so, and I don't gainsay the statement for a moment. At the same time I cannot but believe, from stories I have heard from personal friends of their own experiences, that most determined attempts are sometimes made by large numbers of wolves to get at cattle or horses in really lonely and not well-guarded corrals. One particular story I heard, of a personal friend of mine, was to the effect that when he was left alone at such a winter-corral for two or three days, the wolves attacked the wire-fenced enclosure. Some managed to get into it in spite of a bright dry-wood fire he kept up, and the use of rifles, for he was well-armed, with which he brought down those that managed to break through. When his friends returned from their brief holiday, he was on the verge of a mental breakdown from his terrible experience, but he made a complete recovery, and later did splendid work in the North West Mounted Police, losing his life by drowning, in their service. In any case, his experience was quite an exceptional one, and dread of wolves may, in all probability, be altogether discounted to-day.

Before I conclude this chapter, as I have referred to dear old Charterhouse, this is the place to record

a meeting with Cyril Maude, one of its most distinguished sons. He was spending the summer at Oakville, Ontario, where, with his usual versatility, he had arranged to give a performance of "Mrs. Jarley's Waxworks," for the benefit of the village. He promptly commandeered me to act as "Winder Up" of the lay figures, and his patter, as would be expected by those who knew him, kept the audience in a continual roar of laughter.

IV.

Troubles of a Teamster

The Canadian Authorities made great efforts to satisfy the needs of the various tribes of Indians who, for the more part, roamed the prairies and mountains and forests from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The country, however, is so vast, and the difficulties of overseeing the agents and administrators of the various Indian Reserves were so great, that there is no wonder that certain abuses were present in the carrying out of the Government's arrangements for the well-being of the various tribes. Stories were handed about of sharp practices of agents who carried out their duties with the one idea of getting rich as quick as possible. The flour received by the Indians was sometimes completely spoiled in the sacks; the blankets were of such shoddy material that they fell to pieces directly they were used, and in other ways what had been promised was found to be useless. These rumours created great indignation, especially in the North-West in 1885, and the angry feelings of the natives was fanned by a half-breed, named Louis Riel. Fifteen years before this, he had been largely responsible for the "Red River Rebellion," when Fort Garry, one of the strongest of the Hudson Bay Company's forts, had been seized by Indians. This insurrection came to an inglorious close, because, when Riel heard that Colonel Garnet Wolseley was approaching with trained troops, he took shelter in the United States.

He made a determined effort to arouse all the Indians to join him in an attempt to drive out the white folk; trying to make the Indians and half-breeds think that he was an agent from Heaven to

effect their freedom, that they might have all the country once again for themselves. Open rebellion broke out in the spring of 1885. While troops were engaged in putting it down, farmers were asked to come with their teams to carry provisions and other necessities to the troops engaged at the Front. My Boss allowed me to take a pair of horses and one of his wagons, which was not to be wondered at as the pay for the outfit was about £2 a day. The base for starting was Moosejaw, and our orders were to load up in the morning, and go on our way as soon as the twelve teams were ready. Meanwhile we had orders to get all our horses shod by a Government blacksmith. I took my horses to him, and he fixed shoes to the feet, the first footwear they had ever known, as it is quite unnecessary to shoe animals whose work lies wholly on the prairie. Noticing that the smith was stingy in his allowance of nails to each shoe, I called his attention to the fact. He replied that that was nothing to make a fuss about, as his job was satisfactorily done if the shoes held on till the horses were out of the shop, and I knew as well as he did that the sooner they came off the better the horses would work!

Having received information that the Sioux Indians who were encamped a few miles away were to hold a pow-wow to decide whether or no they would join in with Louis Riel, and having the evening to spare, I rode off, accompanied by Gerald Spring-Rice and a Canadian named Smith, to a quiet spot where we left our horses, and then crawled to a high bank from which we had, by means of glasses, an excellent view of the Sioux village, and the Indian braves squatting round a fire. It was a weird sight, for the sun had just set, and the firelight in the gathering gloom lit up the warriors in their warpaint. Some fierce speeches were made, but the older men had a

quieting effect on the blood-thirsty youths, who were longing for a chance to distinguish themselves in battle. We had to leave without learning the outcome of the pow-wow, but we learned later on that the pacific advice of the older braves was followed, and no Sioux took part in the rebellion. As poor Gerald Spring-Rice gave his life for his country in the Great War and Smith is also dead, I may be the only white man alive who has seen an Indian pow-wow and war dance in time of war!

Early the following morning we loaded our wagons with nearly two tons each of goods. My consignment consisted of boxes of corned beef and biscuits, with a few sacks of beans; a very difficult load to keep steady on our long, roadless journey. By good luck, John, a French Canadian, who, from previous experience, was soon to become our guide, was able to give us many useful hints as to hitches and knots. Travelling in a northerly direction we soon lost touch with civilization, making about twelve miles before sundown. We then tethered our horses, giving each a feed of oats, got our own suppers, and formed the wagons into a corral, inside which we tied the horses, when night fell.

As we had not been allowed to take tents we slept under our wagons, at our horses' heads. In the night I was awakened by a heavy storm, and found my ground sheet holding water, and myself soaked to the skin. The only aftermath of this wetting was an aching tooth (which all the teamsters who liked had a try to extract, but which after fifty years still lives comfortably in its original socket), and a wet pair of top-boots, which I could not get on my feet for a couple of days. This misfortune was remedied by an old sack, and as little walking was needed I managed quite happily without them.

The country consisted of rolling prairie, but occasionally we came upon a stiff rise. When this happened we left six of the twelve wagons, and yoked their horses on to the leading six; then, upon arrival at the top, we led all the horses down, and dragged up the remainder. The weather was very hot, and the mosquitoes and sand flies were maddening to horses as well as to men. By smearing wheel-grease on the most insect-attractive parts of the horses, we gave them much relief.

One day we made our midday halt near the "Elbow" of the South Saskatchewan River. As soon as I had seen to my horses, I stripped and entered the water and swam to the opposite bank. By the time I reached it I was quite ready for a rest, not having had a swim for many months past. Imagine my disgust when I saw on the bit of ground below the bank a rattle-snake with its eyes fixed upon me in baleful indignation. In spite of my anxiety for a *pic-a-terre* I at once turned tail and swam back to where my clothes were reposing. There is surely no time at which a man realises his weakness so acutely, as when, in *natu naturalibus*, he is confronted by an enemy!

Our daily menus were somewhat alike, and we longed for a change of diet from bacon and beans when we pulled up at what is to-day the town of Saskatoon, and an important railway centre. At the time of which I write the settlement consisted of a single shack, across the top of which, in large black letters, were the words

SASKATOON STORES.

All we teamsters made for it immediately; but found that the goods displayed were not very

tempting. I managed, however, to get hold of a one pound pot of best Scotch marmalade, for which I paid one dollar and a half. That evening, when the pot was opened, it was found to consist of about a teaspoonful of dried orange peel—the sugar and other ingredients had wasted their fragrance upon the dry air of the prairie! It was a keen disappointment to several hungry mouths.

Visitors to the West are often struck with wonder at the smartness in emergencies shown by the Canadians. I recall my admiration at the extraordinary quickness with which a wagon wheel, smashed to pieces by an unfortunate crash against a rock, was mended by the driver. So well was the job done that the wagon carried its heavy load through rough and roadless country to its destination, and brought it back, when emptied, to the Base at Moosejaw.

Before leaving home we had been warned that we should have to pass through a very dry tract of country, and should provide ourselves with water for man and beast. This we did with some barrels we took with us for the purpose. On the first day of the crossing of this scorched-up prairie we arrived about 11 a.m. at a dry slough, where there was plenty of grass. Each man had a mug of water and a half-pailful for his horses, and, after dinner, a man was told off to keep a watch for Indians. Our orders were, if we were attacked, to set fire to our wagons, and ride off as best we could on our horses. I lay down under my wagon, and fell asleep at once. On awaking, I found myself looking up the barrel of a heavy revolver, held steadily by a Mexican cowboy!

“What’s up?” I asked.

“Not you,” was the reply, “unless you want daylight let into you!” So I lay still until the

"Greaser" allowed me to rise. I then learned that our watchman had slept and had not noticed the approach of seventy teamsters, engaged on similar work to ours. They had come from the North, and were short of water. Seeing our outfit, they sent on men who, finding us all asleep, stood over us with their revolvers, until the rest of their party had made use of all our water.

When we had learned from these men what our route should be, we enquired when we were likely to find water.

"Follow our trail, and you will get water by sundown to-morrow." It was an unpleasant outlook, but the only thing to do was to make the best of it, so we hitched up our horses, and went on our way as cheerfully as we could. None of our party will forget that night: the misery of thirst, the restlessness of the horses, the unwearying attention of the mosquitoes and sand flies. We started off at 6 o'clock, as no one could manage a waterless breakfast. Pausing for a few minutes only at midday we realised about 5 p.m. that the horses could smell water. Fearing a stampede, and the loss of our loads by accidents, we unharnessed our teams, and drove them along the trail, until a big slough appeared before us. It proved to be a "muskeg," i.e., owing to its marshy approach, it was impossible to get near the water, so, while some of us restrained the maddened horses, the rest cut bundles of long grass, which in an hour or so enabled us to make a path to the water, whereby we could dip buckets, which were passed back from hand to hand. It was dark by the time horses and men were satisfied. We then returned to the wagons, where we spent the night in the usual manner.

Following the Mexicans' trail we at length reached the banks of "the crossing," for which we were bound.

It was with a sigh of relief that we threw off our loads, and received a receipt for them from the Officer in charge.

The return journey was comparatively easy going. One incident in it stands out clearly in my memory. It was my watch, and I stood in my wagon with my rifle. Alas! the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak, and, like the disciples of old, I slept, standing up as I was! What awoke me I do not know, but only a few yards away from the wagon was a timber-wolf, gazing at me with astonishment. It was just the hour to arouse the camp, but I didn't dare to do so while the wolf stood there, as all would have realised my lapse of duty. I tried to frighten the wolf with various antics and the throwing of sticks, etc. At last he turned tail, and when a good distance away, I awoke the camp, without anyone knowing that I had betrayed my trust.

Upon reaching Moosejaw I stabled and fed the horses, and then made for the hotel. Asking for a bed, I was met with the question, "Are you clean?" This reminded me that campers-out, who had chosen good tenting spots, where Indians had pitched their tepees in other days, were apt to bring back with them minute reminders of their former victims, in the form of "greybacks." Fortunately, I had not been thus singled out, and, upon the landlord being assured upon this point, he led me to a decent little bedroom, and, wishing him good-night, and saying that I did not wish to be called till 7 o'clock, he left me. What happened after that I did not learn for several hours. I was nearly done-in, for in addition to the usual difficulties on the road, one of my horses had developed a sore shoulder, which gave me much extra work and anxiety. The next thing I remembered was being shaken by the arms, and the landlord telling me I must get up.

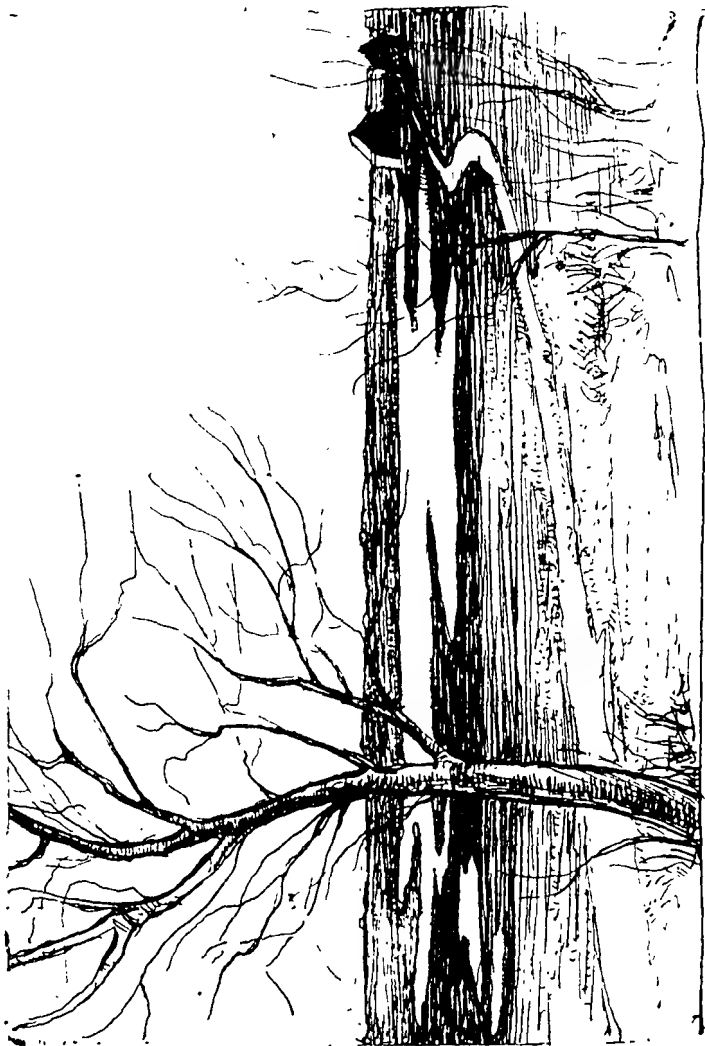
"What's the time?" I asked.

"Six o'clock has struck," was the reply.

"But I asked you to let me lie till seven!" I exclaimed, in an amazed way.

"It's six o'clock in the evening," said the landlord. "You've slept the clock round twice, and that ought to be enough for the present!"

I found out afterwards that my appearance upon entering the hotel hall had been noticed by the visitors there, one of whom remarked, "That young chap will have the 'jim-jams,'" meaning that I looked as though I was on the verge of D.T. . The result was that the landlord had a look at me, later in the evening, and found that I had laid down on the bed without so much as taking off my boots. He did this for me and tucked me up in bed and generally looked well after me! Other men looked after my horses. I was much touched by their kindness to a complete stranger. But this is the way of the North West. The men may be rough, but they are as good-hearted as they are capable.



COCKS' DAM IN AUTUMN.
(See page 25).



Breaking Silence

Harvest was over. The ploughs were busy getting the land ready for next year's crop. When I was not on a "sulky" driving four horses abreast on a furrow a mile long, with two shares beneath me, turning the prairie turf, my spare hours were occupied digging a well in the Coulee. This was very trying work, as, in addition to the foulness of the air, at a depth of 80 feet or more, there is a cramped feeling when the well is only three feet across. In addition to these discomforts, there is at all times a sense of danger, when there is no wooden "curb" to line the walls. I remember Archie McGillivray's cheering response, when he was working the windlass at the top, and I was resting for a moment at the bottom, when I asked :

"What would you do, Archie, if the well caved in on me?"

"Guess we'd put a stone over you, pardner!"

When one came to think it over, nothing else could be done!

It was at supper that the Boss remarked: "Bill, what about the five acres you have to plough up on your reserve?"

In order to get hold of 160 acres of land from the Government, you had to put up a shack, and, among other things, plough five acres during the first year of tenancy. The shack had been built, but Bill had

never shown any anxiety to do the ploughing needed to fulfil his contract. The Boss had promised Bill that he would lend him oxen and all necessaries for this part of his agreement.

Bill made no reply, and was evidently so uncomfortable that I spoke to him about it later on. It then came out that Bill, who was only 18 years old, did not relish the idea of going off by himself to live in his lonely shack for a week or so. When I understood that he would prefer to throw up his land rather than go off by himself to plough the five acres, I offered to take his place. This offer was gratefully accepted.

On a Monday morning I left the farm in one of the wagons, with a yoke of oxen. My load consisted of a plough, firewood, barrels of water, food and blankets, cooking utensils, and everything else we thought might be needed. The water was carried in disused coal-oil (i.e., paraffin) casks. These casks were the only ones available at that time, and, although they had been burned out and carefully cleaned, the water never ceased to taste strongly of oil. It was therefore said to be healthy, but it was decidedly unpleasant.

We travelled in a direct line, in a westerly direction, accompanied by Mingo, a faithful collie. I don't know how the trouble began, but suddenly I realised that Mingo was frightfully excited, and the next moment was fighting furiously with a large badger. By the time I had halted the oxen and reached the scene of the fight, Brockie had got a firm grip of Mingo's throat, and would in another moment throttle her. My only weapon at the moment was a pocket-knife. Grasping this firmly, and seizing the opportunity when the left side was presented to me, I thrust the larger blade into the badger's body up to the hilt.

No further blow was needed. Mingo was exhausted, so I added her to the wagon's load, as well as the body of her assailant. His skin is under my feet as I write to-day ; after 52 years the pelt is as perfect as ever, for the first thing I did upon arrival at Bill's shack was to skin the animal and nail it up on one of the walls.

Having unloaded the wagon, I cooked dinner, and then proceeded to choose as level a spot as possible near the shack for ploughing. Then I marked out the five acres, and made a start at "breaking" them. The furrow was a quarter of a mile long, the share one foot wide, so it was an easy matter to calculate how many times to go up and down in order to turn the necessary quantity of land.

Having hobbled the oxen and watered them, I had supper, and settled down to read. But prairie air and hard work are an excellent soporative, and I soon wrapped myself in my blankets and slept. I was awakened by a horribly weird cry, which, had I not heard it before, would have been most alarming. On the previous occasion I was in a tent, all by my lonesome, and some miles from my nearest neighbour. I had only had a few days' experience of the North West and mistook the sound for an Indian warhoop. Clad merely in pyjamas, I seized my rifle and crawled under the tent, not through the door, to about a hundred yards away, expecting to see a rush of braves with their tomahawks. But nothing happened, so I said to myself, "If I stay here, on the snow, I shall freeze to death. Perhaps it was some animal crying. I'd better get under cover again." As I approached the tent, the cry came again, with its nerve-wracking screech, this time from the ridge of the tent itself, and I recognised it as the song of the screech owl! Beyond this one alarm nothing untoward occurred on any of my five lonely nights.

During the day time, I was sometimes cheered by the mirage. On one occasion I remember watching the boys on Joe Poyser's farm, and could see them quite clearly, though they were some miles away, and there was a rise of land between us which made it impossible to see their farm under ordinary circumstances.

When I found the silence oppressive I cheered myself and the oxen with a Canadian song, "Sucking cider through a straw," or "Jerry go oil the car," the latter being a favourite of the C.P.R. section men. But my favourite has not been published, so it may as well see the light now :

THE SETTLER'S SONG.

A Settler's life out West is the freest and the best
 For all the boys who "Rule Britannia" sing :
 Then keep these free-gift farms safe in loyal British arms,
 You'll ne'er regret it if you start next Spring.

(Chorus)

So to English men and girls, whether ploughboys, clerks, or earls,
 If the dear old Country don't want you at home :
 Just pack up all your goods for Canada's backwoods
 And prairies six feet deep in virgin loam.

Verse 2.

Though summer hours are long, you can sing at night a song,
 When "doing chores" or "making smudge" for cows ;
 You ne'er bemoan your fate though you work from dawn till
 late
 With harvesters, or drills, or sulky ploughs.

Verse 3.

Though winter nights are cold, and cruel tales are told
 Of tricks the frost will play with hands and feet :
 But you're safe if you don't stir without moccasin and fur ;
 And from Spring to Fall the weather can't be beat.

By midday on Saturday I had finished the breaking of the five acres, and had loaded up the plough and all other impedimenta in the wagon. The return home was quite uneventful, and Bill's gratitude was warm, though quietly expressed. One would expect that after a period of enforced silence there would be a longing for talk. But this is not borne out by experience. In the North West we generally found that when a trapper or other backwoodsman returned to civilization he was almost tongue-tied, and found a conversation very difficult to maintain.

An exciting piece of news awaited my return. A cricket match had been arranged between Pense and Regina for the following Saturday. This created great enthusiasm, as many settlers had not seen cricket played for long years past. We drove in two wagons to Regina on the Saturday morning, and the match was duly played on prairie grass, which willing helpers had tried to flatten during the week. It was a weird game, as no one could guess what the ball would do between the stumps, or behind the wicket, and many were the bruises caused by the erratic 'pill.' The result of the match I am unable to recall, but it was what happened on the following morning that will ever be impressed upon the memory of the Pense party.

Bishop Anson was due to preach at the station waiting room at Pense at 11 a.m., and as our two loads contained a large proportion of the expected congregation, we were anxious to be there in good time. We made an early start, and had travelled a mile or so, when we saw six members of that splendid body "the North West Mounted Police" riding towards us from their barracks. We pulled up in order to learn what they wanted, and received orders to report ourselves at once at the barracks. The men, who recognised us,

for some of them had watched the match the previous afternoon, felt very uncomfortable at having to carry out their orders, for they saw that a mistake had been made. The fact was that Louis Riel was in prison at Regina, and orders had been sent to all Indian Reserves, etc., that no Indians or half-breeds were to leave their homesteads for the present. As there were some ladies in our party, it was a natural mistake to think that we might be a party of half-breeds, and perhaps up to some mischief.

As we were making our way towards the barracks, escorted by the Police with their rifles pointing towards us, the Boss asked them, "Are your rifles loaded?" Receiving an affirmative reply, he remarked, "Then would you please turn their spouts the other way. They might go off!"

When the Colonel recognized the blunder that had been made, he was profuse in his apologies, explaining exactly how the mistake had been made.

Unfortunately the affair didn't end there. The "Regina Leader" got hold of the story immediately, and published a special edition, with the heading, "The Hog shows his bristles again!"

It described our inoffensive party, making great efforts to attend Divine Service, being frustrated by the criminal officiousness of the Colonel of the Mounted Police, etc., etc. The fact was that the able but excitable editor had been heavily fined a few weeks earlier for bringing some whisky into Regina, which was strictly under prohibition. Now he saw a chance of "getting some of his own back," and took it.

Our party, in the end, reached the waiting-room in time to welcome the Bishop and assist in the Service.

A Rocking-Stone

The hospitality of the North Westers, and, I believe of all Canadians, is unbounded. This is so well understood that strange liberties are undertaken even with the belongings of people who happen to be absent from their homes. I will give just one instance.

My Boss and one of his men were bringing home two loads of hay from the slough where it had been made in the summer. It was in winter, and all looked serene as they started on their way with their wagons. When about midway between the slough and the farm they saw ominous signs that a blizzard was approaching and would overtake them where the prairie afforded no shelter for man or beast. Knowing that a man had decided to settle close to where they were about to pass, they made for his shack, which they reached just as the storm began.

Drawing the wagons close to the house, they opened the door, to find a perfectly bare room, the only furniture being a common iron stove. There was not even a floor to it. With some difficulty they brought all four horses into the shack, and hitched them at one end of it. Bringing in hay they fed them, and made beds for themselves. There was no fuel, and, as a fire was a real necessity, as without doubt the thermometer would register 30 degrees below zero, they began to rip off the boards that lined the house. Thus feeding the fire for warmth and to melt snow for themselves and the horses, they occupied nearly all their time, day and night. After three days the storm, ceased, and they were able to continue their journey ;

but the appearance of the shack, when cleared of its temporary occupants, was enough to make its owner throw a fit. However, the matter, when explained, was treated with light-hearted complacency ; the damage was made good, while the owner congratulated the Boss and his man upon the providential situation of his unfurnished home.

On another occasion our four plough-oxen had disappeared. It was fairly easy for them to do so, as, in spite of the general flatness of the prairie, there are hollows here and there, where cattle can feed for a day or so without revealing their presence to anxious owners. The Boss had spent many hours searching for them, and in the afternoon I volunteered to walk to Dick Turner's farm, about three miles to the east of us, and find out if he had seen anything of them. Just before I started, a neighbour who was passing the farm, learning the direction I was taking, asked me if I would shoot an ox of his which was suffering from a swollen leg and lying beside the Grand Coulee. I therefore took my revolver, a fairly heavy one, and promised to do what he asked.

I found the wretched ox without any trouble. It was lying down, and had a terribly swollen leg, though it did not appear to be in pain. There was plenty of grass around, and a pool of water, as the Coulee had not yet dried right up. I had never before killed an ox, and, as I looked at its great body, I wondered which was the exact spot for the bullet, as, of course, I was anxious to spare the animal any further suffering. Putting the gun to the spot where I imagined the heart to be, I pulled the trigger. The ox made no sound, but, with some difficulty owing to its swollen leg, it stood up and began to eat grass ! I therefore put another bullet into it, about an inch from where the first had entered. Without a murmur, or sign

of suffering, it walked a few yards to the water and took a long drink. Suddenly the thought came to me that the centre of the forehead was the spot to fire at to ensure certain death. I put the third bullet right in the centre between the eyes, and the poor beast, to my great satisfaction, fell dead.

True gentleman as he proved himself to be, the owner, though he noticed my mistake when he skinned the carcase, made no allusion to my ignorance, either to myself or to the neighbours.

On the way to Dick Turner's, I came across a large white rock in a hollow. This had evidently been a favourite rubbing-block for buffaloes, as the ground around the base was deeply worn by their hooves and there were hairs still sticking to crevices in it. It interested me, because, except in the Coulee itself, one seldom saw a rock or stone on the prairie.

In Western yarns we had often wondered if there was any truth in the reports of the immense herds of buffaloes which roamed the prairies in the old days. A very short visit to our part of the North West at once enabled us to believe in the enormous size of these herds. Every hundred yards or so you came across the skeleton of a buffalo. The bones had been picked by foxes and birds of prey, but were scarcely at all scattered. So thickly lay these heaps of bones that whenever we took a wagon to the station we always filled it with them, and received a dollar for the load upon arrival at the store. The explanation for their demand was that they were needed in the process of sugar-boiling, but it seemed queer that the sugar people should go two or three thousand miles for the bones!

Arriving at Dick Turner's, I was hospitably received with an invitation to tea which allowed of

no refusal. He was a bachelor and had come from Northumberland, and had a remarkable memory for old folk songs, at least one of which has since been incorporated in a collection that has been published. He hadn't seen the oxen, but was so glad to see a friend, that he kept me till it was nearly dark. Long before I reached home it became quite dark, and, at last, after making my way west until I was sure I could not be more than a mile or two away, I decided to wait for the lantern which was always run up to the top of a pole when anyone was benighted, as other wise it was practically impossible to find one's way home after dark.

Noticing a white spot in the darkness, I walked towards it, thinking that it was the Buffalo Stone which I had noticed earlier in the afternoon. As it was just about a comfortable height for a seat, I put my hand on it, and was about to sit down, when it moved from under me and threw me off on to the ground ! Imagine my surprise and delight, when I had picked myself up, to find that the supposed rock was our white ox Jack, the three other deserters lying close beside him.

It was not long before the light shone from our beacon. Whereupon I removed the hobbles from the legs of the oxen and drove them home in triumph.

The same lantern was of great service to me on another occasion, which will always be clearly remembered by me as one of the most disagreeable experiences that I met with in the North West.

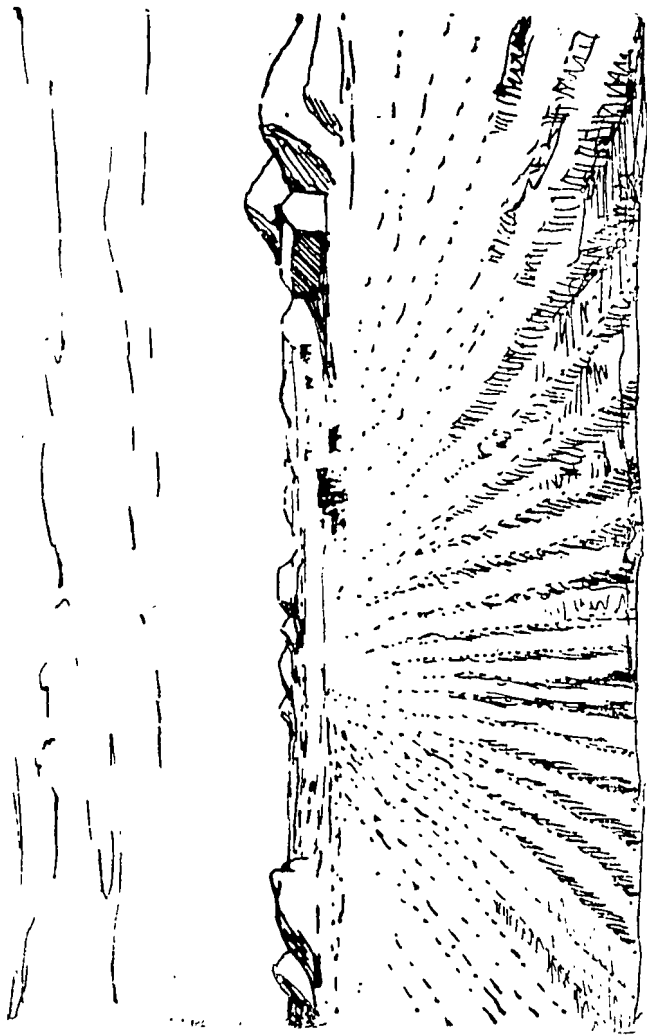
The day had been a very hot one, and the evening was damp and very close. Not a breath of air was moving, when I "forked" the pony "Cinderella" to drive the cows and oxen to our nearest slough for

their evening drink. There were eight in all, and they went quietly enough until they had satisfied their thirst. Then the trouble began. It was the worst night for mosquitoes that I experienced during all my stay on the prairie. They rose from the slough in swarms and settled on man and beast in their thousands. Cinderella had no saddle or bridle, but was well trained for cattle-driving, her direction being guided by her rider's knees. Before I understood what was happening the cattle were off at a gallop against the wind, in a northerly course, as they know by instinct that mosquitoes don't like to fly against the breeze. Whilst trying to head them off and drive them back home, I lost my hat and the silk handkerchief I wore round my neck, which left me with nothing but a shirt, a pair of knickers, and top-boots. This meant no protection for my head and neck, and "skeeters" could bite through the shirt as though it didn't exist. Fortunately the cows made for John Poyser's farm, and he and Albert Banister hearing their approach, came out and stopped them. When they were turned, with their faces towards home, they gave me my direction by pointing to two bright stars.

"Keep them before you, and you'll get there all right."

So off we started again; but the beasts had been thoroughly aroused and were very troublesome. I had to ride round them several times, and, in doing so, lost my guiding stars, mistaking another pair for them. After half-an-hour or so had passed, I knew that something had gone wrong, so I waited for the lantern to guide me home. That wait meant Purgatory to me as well as to the animals. My hands never ceased rubbing the skeeters on my neck, and I was covered with blood. How thankful I was to see the longed-for lantern.

The cows also saw it, about two miles off, and made a bee-line for it, for they knew, from past experience, that there would be a 'smudge,' that is, a fire with damp straw upon it, which would make a dense smoke and drive the mosquitoes away. My head and neck and knees were a 'sight' the next day, and I could easily believe, after such an experience, that it would be quite possible for a man to lose his mind under similar circumstances, if the misery was prolonged. Such a night as this, however, is not a common occurrence on the prairie, for however hot the day may be, one can nearly always sleep comfortably under two blankets.



THE PRAIRIE, GATESGARTH FARM.

VII.

Supplies for Winter

Lying to the south of our farm, appearing to be within quite an easy walk in that clear air, but in reality some thirty or more miles away, was a range of hills which we knew as The Dirt Hills and Wood Mountain. Ever since I saw them in the distance I longed to explore them, especially as they reminded me of the Malvern Hills, which I had known from my childhood in the Midlands.

At last the opportunity came, as the Boss had a 'hunch' that there were possibilities for his brains in that district which might surpass those afforded by the prairie proper. In any case, as he reckoned upon our finding vast flocks of ducks and geese, and other migrants making their way south in the fall, we were warned to bring back our wagon loaded with birds of various kinds for the larder.

We knew nothing of the country which lay between us and the hills, our only map being one which, after our experiences, we decided had been made by guess-work, which had so many lakes blued upon it that we were led to believe our chief obstacle on the road would be the frequent delays caused by the search for a track between the sloughs. As a matter of fact, we did not see a drop of water from the time we left the farm until the next day, when we found pools at intervals all over the hills.

The going was very heavy, as the surface was so cracked that however carefully we drove, the wagon frequently sank up to the hubs, our progress being

thus rendered very slow. We had taken no water with us, as we expected to find plenty on the road. The result was that when we neared the hills, it became dark, and we could go no further till daylight again appeared. It was unpleasant to camp without tea for ourselves and water for the horses. However, we felt sure of a plentiful supply the next day, so made the best of the necessity.

Early the next morning we drove up the hill, passing much scrub and trees, which showed that this part of the country escaped the fires which swept over the prairie proper and prevented the growth of any kind of timber.

In spite of a thirst, for we had had no drink since the previous midday, we couldn't help a keen joy in looking upon the beauties of nature again, after the dull khaki of the prairie during the summer months, when the prolific roses, crocuses, and other charms of the spring have died off. The trees and shrubs on the hillside were just at the height of their autumn riot of colour, and presented a feast of beauty to our eyes.

Our first object was a pool of water, and this was quickly found. We then camped, and separated, in order to search the district, so as to be able to give some account of it to the Boss. There were quite a number of water-holes, and all of them had a beautiful covering of ducks and other waterfowl, which seemed but little disturbed by the presence of a white man. We saw no signs of Indians.

We had been accompanied by Mingo, our faithful collie. She, of course had been quite as excited as we were in the fresh terrain, and explored every brake and bush with the greatest thoroughness. While

doing so, she found an enemy whose acquaintance she had not previously made; and deeply she regretted, for many days after, her curiosity. For it turned out to be a skunk, and poor Mingo received the full force of its horrible weapon. As she rushed back to she tent she was delayed, fortunately, by an attack of sickness, and we, realizing at once what was the matter, got a cord and led her to a distant tree to leeward, where she spent the night in scented misery.

As we turned-in for the night, we experienced the most violent thunder-storm that it was my lot to meet with in the North West, which is, as a rule, fairly free from such visitations. The thunder was so continuous that it was impossible to make your next neighbour hear what you wanted to say to him. If there came a temporary lull in the storm, it was pitiful to hear the cries and moans of Mingo in the soaking rain. Our one consolation was that the bath she was having would do something to lessen the appalling smell of her visitor of the afternoon. This proved correct, but it was only after several baths and much soap that she became once again a fit inmate for the haunts of human beings.

We spent a couple of days exploring the Dirt Hills, and shot enough ducks for the winter supply. On our return journey, while one drove the horses, the others sat at the tail of the wagon and plucked the birds, thus leaving a thirty mile trail of feathers.

The drive was not without its excitement, as we suddenly saw in the distance two animals, which seemed to be coming in our direction. After some guesswork, for there was something odd about their gait, and every now and then they halted and hesitated, we saw that they were horses, and waited for them to come up to us. As they drew near we found that one of them was

hobbled, so we soon caught him, removed the hobbles, and tied him to the wagon-tail. The other followed close on his heels. Having brought them safely home, we made enquiries and found that a reward of forty dollars was being offered for them. The owner stated that he had been prospecting down south and had had a strange experience. He was sleeping on the ground, wrapped in blankets, when he awoke with a feeling of suffocation. What was his amazement when he found that a timber wolf had curled itself up on the top of him and was sleeping peacefully! On being awakened rudely, it made off at once, but to the prospector's disgust, his horses had also made their get-away! He had found the journey home, on Shank's mare, encumbered with the furniture of his horses, a very trying one. His delight at receiving the horses back unharmed, was only exceeded by his astonishment that we refused to accept the reward he had promised for their return.

His story of the wolf's behaviour sounds almost incredible, but there was no reason for the man to make a fairy tale, and strange things often happen 'Out West.'

By the time we reached home winter was upon us and our birds were in excellent condition. We were able to keep them in the open all through the next six months. During the hot weather our best larder was a dry well, in which we could hang, by means of cords, any bird or joint of meat that had to be kept from the heat. In spite of the hot summer the frost never quite leaves the ground, so that the temperature of a well below ten feet in depth is just what is needed to keep meat in good condition.

One of the most astonishing sights on the prairie is the number of swans, geese, turkeys, ducks, snipe, and other birds that fly north in the spring and south in

the fall. One flight after another is seen from morn till eve. The early settler, tired of his endless bacon and beans, watches these flocks of birds with envy. They would make a pleasant change to a monotonous diet. Some who arrived early in our part of the country soon decided that there was "money" in these walks of snipe, sorts of wildfowl, gaggles of geese, or paddlings of ducks, if they could be killed and taken to market. It was my lot to fall in with one of these gentry, in a very out-of-the-way spot.


Our party were prospecting north of the C.P.R. in the neighbourhood of Long Lake and Buffalo Lake. We camped one evening in some thick timber, with plenty of undergrowth, a pleasant change of scene from the prairie proper. In the twilight we were wandering around when we came across a trail, and following it found ourselves at a good-sized shack and unusually large outbuildings. At the entrance to the house stood an elderly man who proved to be the exception to the rule as to the hospitality of Canadians. For he not only asked us what our business was on his land, but made it quite plain that he preferred our room to our company. We had no wish to force ourselves upon him, so we soon cleared off.

When our experience was made known in Regina, a visit was made to the place by a detachment of the Mounted Police. The inspection revealed the presence of a still and a large quantity of raw spirit. At first the Police were puzzled by what they found, as there had been no complaints of the sale of illegal whisky to people in the locality. A careful search soon explained to the Police the object of the spirit. The lake was a favourite resting-place of migrant geese and other water birds and our surly acquaintance was in the habit of steeping grain in the raw spirit and then scattering it on the banks on the lake. Too weary

after their long flight to search for food, the birds fell victims to the steeped corn, and, staggering about after a mouthful or two, they became easy victims to the snare laid for them. In the neighbouring settlements a sale was quickly arranged and a thriving business had been built up. The surly poulterer at length found that illegal spirit-manufacture will sometimes lead to a great depression of spirits in solitary confinement.

Each fall, as winter approached and farm work slackened, the Boss would go prospecting for "pastures new," at the same time keeping the larder's supply in view. He took a wagon and tent with all provisions needed for board and lodging, carefully avoiding any district which happened to be more or less inhabited. There is something wonderfully exciting in exploring fresh country which you can easily imagine has never before been trodden by white men, though Indians may have passed through it. When we happened to camp in what seemed to be a likely spot for the situation of a Neches' tepee in days gone by, I always made a point of searching the vicinity in case anything of interest had been overlooked by the late wayfarers. On certain occasions my labour was rewarded, and I still have in my possession an iron tomahawk, a spear-head, and other relics of the original prairie roamers. The various Indian tribes were in general wanderers, not like Arabs changing their quarters from day to day as cattle-food ran short, but having their fixed summer and winter villages, making, perhaps, long journeys from one to the other.

On several occasions I saw an Indian family on the move. Two long poles were attached like shafts to the sides of a horse, the ends dragging on the ground. These were securely lashed one to another, and between them the tepee and all their worldly goods were secured.



Any papoose or child too young to walk would hold on to a rope, the mother would walk beside the load, herself borne down with a heavy load of skins or "buffalo robes" as they were called, in addition to a tightly swaddled baby hanging on her back by means of a sling from her neck. Her lord generally walked in front, his only encumbrance being his gun. He appeared to scorn hard work, for on one occasion I watched such a party, as they arrived at a spot where they decided to camp. The squaw did all the work, while her man calmly smoked his pipe. At the same time I am bound to say that I saw many fine-looking Indians, Crees, Blackfoot, and Sioux, some of whom could have given points in looks to their white brothers. One man, in particular, held my attention, as his appearance so resembled Mr. W. E. Gladstone, that I remarked upon him as being his "double." I mention this as one so often reads of Indians as being more or less outcasts from humanity. In no part of the world, I suppose has Missionary work had grander results than among these people so despised by the nickname of Los or Neches. Both men and women of various tribes are showing by the result of their examinations in all kinds of sciences that their brains are as capable as those of their white conquerors. All praise is due to those who, whether Catholics or Protestants, have devoted their lives to the furtherance of Christianity amongst these peoples who in former days were better known for their cruelty than for any other quality. No greater heroism has been shown in the world at large than is recorded in the lives of Missionaries in the West of Canada.